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OO RUEHGI RUEHMA RUEHROV
DE RUEHKH #1434/01 2661415
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 221415Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1950
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RHMFIS/CJTF HOA

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 KHARTOUM 001434

DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG, AF/C
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ASEC PGOV PREL KPKO SOCI AU UNSC SU
SUBJECT: OVERVIEW OF DARFUR REBEL POSITIONS, RELATIVE STRENGTH, AND
POTENTIAL COORDINATION

REF: A) KHARTOUM 1232

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In two recent visits to El-Fasher and Nyala, UN security provided an overview of Darfur rebel group's positions, relative strength, and potential for coordination. Sources stated that areas of control are fluid and prone to change, especially following GoS operations in North Darfur and East Jebel Marra. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) (Note: Representatives of UN Security from several different offices in both El-Fasher and Nyala provided four separate briefings to poloffs the week of August 24 and September 14. Charged with ensuring security for visits to remote rebel locations and investigating security incidents, these UN sources are some of the most informed and connected observers on the ground in Darfur. Sources names and positions are available via siprnet communications. Due to the complexity of Arab transliteration and inconsistent spelling in UN Maps, spelling of villages are approximate. End Note.)

JEM

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¶3. (SBU) UN sources noted that they expected a JEM attack in Darfur building on the May 10 attack on Omdurman. According to this contact, in late May and early June, JEM positioned several hundred vehicles in three different locations within striking distance of El-Fasher. "JEM threatened that that they were going to stage another attack, and given their locations, it was actually surprising that it did not happen," stated this contact. He continued by saying JEM most likely decided to pursue the political track and shortly after, Khalil Ibrahim gave an ultimatum to the GoS to negotiate by the end of July, or JEM would return to staging attacks. This UN source said that although JEM may have been in discussions with SLA/Unity and SLA/AW in the past several months, "they probably just want to use their areas of control as a rest stop." One UN contact speculated that recent fighting in far North Darfur near Birmaza and Deisa, was designed to block potential routes of passage from the north to Khartoum.

¶4. (SBU) According to another UN Security contact, the Justice and Equality Movement is the only serious, organized, and politically-coherent rebel movement. This contact noted that in late August, UN Security met senior JEM field commanders on the Sudanese border town of Bahai including: JEM Deputy Chief of Staff Suleiman Sandal Hagar, Political Consultant Abu Baker Hammid, Chief of Staff Tajiman Dino Hagar, JEM's Eritrea Representative Dr. Mohammed Ali Mostaf (recently expelled from Cairo after giving a lecture on the Omdurman attack,) and Ibrahim Almas Deng (a JEM Dinka tribesman from South Sudan). According to this source, JEM's positions in Bahai appeared well supplied and well organized, and are reflective of the Chadian-supported movement as a whole. "Bahai now feels like it is in the middle of Dar Zaghawa," noted this

contact.

¶15. (SBU) A separate UN source stated that JEM likely retreated from the Omdurman attack to Chad, its Darfuri mountain stronghold in rugged Jebel Moon, and two other positions. This source specifically mentioned JEM positions in Um Sammango where he claimed JEM forces have approximately 100 vehicles. Another group of approximately 25 JEM vehicles is allegedly positioned outside of Shangil Tobaya, according to UN sources.

SLM/UNITY

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¶16. (SBU) SLM/Unity may still receive limited supplies from Chad as "elements of their movement used to be Chadian President Deby's private bodyguard force," stated one UN contact. Another source asserted that SLM/Unity has a lack of political leadership in Darfur, which has led to much banditry, disorganization, and the absence of command and control structures. Contacts from the UN and the Joint Mediation Support Team had a low opinion of some Unity commanders, with one representative calling SLM/Unity's Ali Karbino "a thug" and another saying "he does his own thing." (Note: Ali Karbino is a former commander of SLM who defected from Minnawi a few months after the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement. According to locally-engaged staff, Karbino has the reputation for being one of the fiercest Zaghawa commanders on the frontline of every battle. End Note.) UN contacts stated that with recent fighting in Birmaza and Deisa, the GoS appears to have "secured a foothold in some areas previously controlled by SLA/Unity."

SLA/AW

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¶17. (SBU) The majority of Abdul Wahid Al-Nur's force is based in KHARTOUM 00001434 002 OF 004

Jebel Marra with another group located in remote northeast Darfur, according to UN security. Without a significant number of vehicles, SLA/AW relies on transportation by foot, horse, and donkey around and near Jebel Marra. In addition to this area, SLA/AW Northern Command operates in a wide area of northeast Darfur (from the village of El Helif to Targambot on North Darfur's border with North Kordofan). One UN source stated that he spent a day with one of SLA/AW key Northern Command leaders, Suleiman Marjan. According to this source, Marjan (from the Meidob tribe) has less than a dozen vehicles, and "it is a bit of stretch" to think that Marjan could stage successful attacks on the GoS in North Darfur as was reported on August 10 and 11 in international media (reftel). Despite one UN Security officer's skepticism, another stated that he has found Marajan to be overall "reliable" and that he provided good security for UNAMID visitors. This contact said he last saw Marjan near Helif (at geocordinates 14043' 25023'). This contacted added that SLA/AW has another small force near Zur (located west of Kabkabiya at geocoordiantes 13035' 23041')

SLA/MM

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¶18. (SBU) UN contacts stated that the areas under Minni Minnawi's control have shrunk rapidly in 2007 and 2008. According to these sources, the GoS supplied and reinforced the SLM/Free Will splinter group to attack SLM/MM from late 2007 to mid 2008. These clashes centered around Kafoud, but spread out along supply routes, where a struggle over taxation rights occurred between SLM/MM and SLM/Free Will. Another UN contact emphasized that this SLM/Free Will-SLM/MM conflict has turned into an ethnic power struggle between the Zaghawa and SLM/Free Will's dominant ethnic groups (i.e. the Tunjur in North Darfur and the Bergit in the South). These sources claimed that SLM/MM and SLM/Unity (both overwhelmingly Zaghawa movements) have worked together to combat these SLM/Free Will attacks, and others (as recent as last week) by the Ma'aliya Arab tribe near Agabullah (east of Ed Daein). UN sources appeared dismissive of reported security arrangements and demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) programs in South Darfur. UN sources also reported that much of the Bergit population in South Darfur is against this integration of SLM/Free Will into the SAF forces, as it will leave many Bergit villages vulnerable to attacks by SLM/MM.

¶19. (SBU) UN sources stated that Minnawi met Khalil Ibrahim in Chad

and proposed that JEM and SLM coordinate under Minnawi's leadership, "something that was clearly rejected." Minnawi has lost fighters and commanders to rival movements, especially JEM following its much celebrated (in Darfur) attack on Omdurman in May 2008, according to UN sources.

¶110. (SBU) UN contacts downplayed recent fighting between SLM/MM and the GoS. For a long time, the GoS has used proxy forces to attack SLM/MM positions, and although the GoS now uses its own forces in direct attacks, "this is not a major change to the government's strategy." UN sources said that they see GOS/SAF deployment to South Darfur as preparation for targeting SLM/MM's positions in South Darfur. According to these sources, the GoS recently moved 40 vehicles near Bulbul (west of Nyala) and more to Shearia and Haskanita. UN contacts stated that the GoS also moved more of its troops close to SLM/MM positions near Tabit on September ¶12.

SLA/ABDUL SHAFIE

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¶111. (SBU) UN contacts repeated, but could not confirm, rumors that Ahmed Abdul Shafie recently received a new shipment of cars from South Sudan. (One contact speculated that this rumor started with a poorly researched UNAMID report that was intercepted by the GoS and later propagated to the international community. Another UN contact thought that the report had more credence saying, "The SPLA has long had political ambitions in Darfur, and now it is finally starting to move into Darfur militarily [through supplying vehicles to Abd Al Shafie.]") Abdul Shafie does have a small force east of Melit composed primarily of Bertit and Meidob, led by field commander Dicta Salih, asserted UN contacts. Shafie has another small position near Daba Dunga, and is responsible for much of the carjacking in these two regions, stated UN contacts.

ARAB TRIBES

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¶112. (SBU) UN contacts described the area around Kabkabiya in North Darfur as "a stronghold of disaffected Arab tribes." The Al-Jund Al-Mazloom ("oppressed soldiers") control much of this area, occasionally traveling into El-Fasher and clashing with the local security forces there. This UN contact stated that these restless Arab militias "completely dominate the area" and have established

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checkpoints between Kabkabiya and Tawila. This source described these semi-autonomous Arab tribes as focusing on banditry, and "in terms of taking land or fighting against the GoS, they are much less motivated than the rebel movements."

¶113. (SBU) Another UN source stated that the GoS has successfully persuaded many of these Arab groups to rejoin government forces after a long hiatus. The GoS has allegedly wooed the Arab tribes (and even the Al-Jund Al-Mazloom) by re-supplying and delivering money to many of the tribes. Most contacts asserted that the GoS led its attacks on Birmaza, Deisa, and East Jebel Marra with an integrated force composed of Arab militia (Janjaweed), Central Reserve Police, and regular SAF troops. (Note: This corresponds with our previous reporting. End Note.)

¶114. (SBU) In South Darfur, break-away groups from former Arab opposition leader Mohamed Hamdan ("Hemeti") have a small force of approximately six vehicles near Tulus. Another semi-autonomous Arab group controls an area south of Ed Daein and rules with approximately 15-20 vehicles, with more forces controlling locations near South Darfur's border with Northern Bahr El-Ghazal. UN sources see former Hemeti fighters as responsible for recent security incidents near Firdus.

¶115. (SBU) UN sources acknowledged that some of the bloodiest clashes in 2007 and 2008 have been between regime-armed Arab tribes. One source stated that he has just received reports that this year the Abbala (camel-herding) Rizegat have returned south two months earlier than usual, and that he expects this change in migration could result in significant tribal conflict over land and water.

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¶16. (SBU) UN sources stated that Chadian Armed Opposition Groups (CAOG) have moved from two separate locations to one position north of El-Geneina. (Note: This also corresponds with previous Embassy reports. End Note.) Chadian armed opposition are responsible for a large amount of hijacking and banditry along the Western border, stated these sources.

OTHER POSITIONS

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¶17. (SBU) According to UNDSS maps, the following smaller movements are located at these corresponding locations.

- SLA/Jabbar Mohamed Bakhit - Tabur Was
- JEM /Collective Leadership - Miski and between Um Baru and Kutum.
- JEM/Khamis Adam - Sheria
- SLA/Peace Wing - Mohajirriah, Ma'aliah, and Sharif
- SLA/Adam Bakhit and JEM/CL (NMRD) - around Kutum

FUTURE COORDINATION

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¶18. (SBU) In addition to widespread reports of coordination between SLM/MM and SLA/Unity, a statement appeared on Sudaneseonline.com on September 7 calling for rebel unification. Adam Ali Shogar, a longtime Zaghawa commander and "General Coordinator of SLM/Field Command," called for "political and military unification... for the sake of Darfur, its future, and its IDPs and refugees." The statement also calls for a conference composed of Abdul Wahid Al-Nur, Khamis Abdullah Abaker, Adam Ali Shoggar, and other well-known SLM leaders including Sharif Harir, Suleiman Ibrahim Marjan, and Suleiman Jamous. (Full text of this statement will be sent to SPG and office of the SE.)

¶19. (SBU) Rebel and UN contacts appeared dismissive of this message. URF's AlHadi Agabaldour told poloff that the statement as a whole is positive, but that URF can "never accept Abdulwahid AL-Nur as chairman of SLM." JEM's Dr. Gibril Fidail (and brother of JEM Chairman Khalil Ibrahim) also told poloff that JEM "will be pleased to have a united SLM," however he appeared skeptical that SLM will ever be able to achieve unity or "get a response from a person like Abdulwahid." UN contacts responded that statements such as these have been made before without any tangible results. "The recent surge of activity by the GoS in Eastern Jebel Marra and the north could have the short- term effect of bringing SLA factions together, but this would be an act of survival and not unification," stated one UN security contact.

COMMENT

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¶20. (SBU) UN contacts elucidated a number of important themes which, if accurate, will lead to a more volatile and militarized

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Darfur. Disaffected Arab tribes are returning to the GoS following a concerted recruitment effort by the regime. SLM/MM and SLM/Unity coordination is significant, but long-term coordination across other rebel lines is unlikely. SLM/MM's loss of both land and commanders in 2007-2008, threatens the movement's very existence in many areas of Darfur. GoS deployment to South Darfur may be used eventually to directly attack SLM/MM's positions. These themes and many others (including the division of many movements along ethnic lines, ongoing Chad-Sudan conflict, and the lack of a single and coherent peace process) will continue to drive the violent, volatile, and chaotic dynamic in Darfur.

FERNANDEZ